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SOME ASPECTS OF COMMUNIST PENETRATION IN GUATEMALA

I. PENETRATION IN LABOR

Background

The labor movement in Guatemala dates, in effect, from the October revolution of 1944, which overthrew the long-standing and repressive Ubico dictatorship and furnished the beginnings of the present governmental regime. Since late 1944 industrial labor in the country has been rather widely organized. Organization of rural labor, which constitutes a much larger proportion of the Guatemalan population, is far from complete, but a sustained campaign for this purpose is underway.

There are three federations of labor unions in Guatemala: The Syndical Federation of Guatemala (FSG), the Confederation of Workers of Guatemala (CTG), and the Central Regional Federation of Workers (FRCT). These three are linked together by an overall coordinating committee, the National Committee for Syndical Unity (CNUS). FSG is generally considered the larger; it claims to include sixty-four industrial and ten rural labor unions. The strength of CTG, on the other hand, consists principally of farm-worker syndicates. FRCT is of minor importance.

The labor movement in Guatemala is very young and is vastly inexperienced. Thus it has not been difficult for a few clever and determined leaders to take charge of its development

development. These leaders have acted with such success that they now have the organized labor of the country virtually in the palms of their hands.

The masses of Guatemalan labor have no particular ideology. There is little conception among Guatemalan laborers of the purposes, organization or normal activities of a genuine labor movement as it is known in this country and in western Europe. Except for the top leaders, Guatemalan labor may be said to be confused and groping rather than to have any pronounced convictions. Union members in general are no doubt convinced that organization is a good thing and will bring them benefits in the form of higher wages and better working conditions. They have a rather subconscious feeling of gratitude to the revolution and to its leaders for their improved status and their newfound power in the national community. Their thoughts go little farther than that.

Union Leadership

The two principal leaders are Manuel Pinto Usaga, who is Secretary-General of the FSG and of the CNUS, and Victor Manuel Gutierrez, who is Secretary-General of the CTG. These men, and perhaps a dozen more of the ranking labor hierarchy, are radical leftists, and there seems little doubt that they are pro-communists in fact and philosophy, if

if not actually card-carrying members of the Communist Party. Several of them have spent considerable periods of time in Moscow and other communist centers.

Under the control of crypto-communists like Pinto and Gutierrez, organized labor in Guatemala is definitely in the pro-communist camp. For instance, the FSG and the CTC are enthusiastic affiliates of the Latin American Confederation of Workers, the communist-dominated CTAL headed by the notorious Mexican, Vicente LOMBARDO Toledano. The leaders of the labor movement are in Guatemala doubtless so well indoctrinated that winning them over would be like converting LOMBARDO Toledano himself. The amorphous rank and file appears totally lacking in the training or experience which would produce promising new leaders of a different orientation to take over in the event of removal of their present chiefs.

II. LABOR'S RELATIONSHIP TO POLITICAL PARTIES

Tactics and Propaganda Line

Guatemalan labor has followed a consistent pattern of establishing political action committees within the various unions. The coincidence of leadership and support is so close that these committees are in reality political arms of their respective unions or syndical federations. The formal separation of the two activities, however, enables the unions to conform to the letter, if not the spirit, of the Guatemalan constitution, which expressly prohibits political action on the part of syndical groups.

Through the medium of these political action committees labor has now entered the political scene enthusiastically and with a determination to play a leading role in the presidential elections scheduled for next December. Following an earlier convention by the political arm of the railroad workers union, probably the country 's strongest single syndicate, a national convention was staged in January of this year by the political committees of all unions in Guatemala.

The convention was controlled by the usual tight group. Speeches and proclamations were replete with communist propaganda, and the hall resounded with vitriolic denunciations of the alleged alliance of reactionary local elements

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with foreign (U.S.) imperialism to crush the glorious Guatemalan revolution and to re-establish a system of oppression and political subjugation which would crus. "the struggle of the people and of the workers".

Resolutions and a policy statement were dutifully rubber stamped, scarcely without discussion, as drafted by the organizing committee. "National unity" was made the watchword. "Deviationism" was condemned. Emphasis was placed on the need for discipline in labor's political movement, and the theme was stressed that the political committees are but a transitional step in the evolution of a labor political party. The United States was specifically labelled the headquarters of neo-fascism, aggression and war, while the USSR and its satellites were specified as the champions of peace, democracy and progress.

A show of democratic procedure was staged in connection with the election of a workers' National Political Committee for a three-year term. Two slates of candidates were presented, both of which received a sizeable number of votes. The victorious list was headed by Pinto Usaga, the defeated one by Gutierrez. Pinto's list included Gutierrez and vice-versa. The line-ups so closely coincided that, as even Diario observed, almost the only difference between the two lists was the candidacy for Secretary-General. The entire performance of the convention demonstrated once again the grip of the party line and its protagonists

protagonists on the Guatemalan labor movement and the weight that this movement carries in Guatemalan politics today.

In furtherance of their plans for the coming elections, the crypto-communists were successful in having Jose Manuel FORTUNY, ex-deputy in Congress and a notorious Soviet apologist and follower of the communist line, if not an actual party member, sworn in by the Congress on February 20, 1950, as a member of the National Electoral Board. The appointment of Fortuny to this three-man board is exceedingly significant with respect to the forthcoming elections, since this body controls vote-counting throughout the country. Fortuny, of the far-left PAR party, thus replaces on the Board a representative of a more moderate party; and the complexion of the Board takes a sharp turn to the left.

Present Relationship to Political Parties

The AREVALO Government has indicated that in seeking to name its successor it will bank principally on the labor vote in the elections scheduled for next December. The increasing political dependence of the Government on labor in recent months naturally influences its stands in any and all labor conflicts, especially those in which foreign capital is involved.

Organized labor, through its political action committees, has strongly endorsed the candidacy of Colonel Jacobo ARBENZ for

for the presidency and is taking a very active part in the campaigning, in alliance with the PAR and RN parties which have launched Arbenz as a "national unity" candidate. PAR and RN are the two farthest left of the three political parties which participate in the Arevalo administration. FPL, the third pro-government party, has so far persisted in its opposition to a military candidate.

Since 1944 Arbenz, who resigned his post as Minister of Defense after accepting the presidential nomination, has been identified politically with the PAR party. Labor's support of him means that labor leaders regard him, despite his military background and connections, as one who would safeguard their gains and allow them full scope. The talk is that Arbenz has promised labor three cabinet posts, and, if it should work out that way, labor would thus have an even more important role in the next administration than it enjoys at present.

At present Arbenz has a commanding position in the race. Up to now the Army appears loyal to him, and, except for the FPL party, the government-labor combination is giving him its backing. However, both these forces are, in essence, imponderables. A third imponderable is the strength of the conservative land-holding and business opposition, first as to its popularity with the masses of the people and second as to the possibility of a deal by it with elements of the

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Army. In short, there are alternative possibilities of a coup d'etat by a conservative-army coalition or of a coup d'etat by Arbenz with army support if President Arevalo, who is a master at intrigue despite his protestations of being "just a simple school teacher", should grow cold on Arbenz and swing administration support in some other direction. Further, Guatemala has a history of political assassination. It is not beyond possibility - indeed it is openly rumored in Guatemala today - that Arbenz will never achieve the presidency, that he will be shot first, either by extreme leftists on his own side such as those who engineered the murder last July of the popular and moderate Colonel Arana or by a desperate opposition move.

Labor's Possible Position in an Arbenz Administration

The Department is inclined to share the widely-held opinion that Arbenz, who is regarded as a ruthless opportunist with no pronounced political convictions other than a desire for power, thinks he is "using" labor and would plan, if elected, to eliminate the extremists in due course and bend the labor movement to his own will and purposes. On the other hand, the possibility must not be discounted that Arbenz shares the extreme ideological views of the labor leaders; nor is it inconceivable that the latter, once in strong government positions, would succeed in consolidating their control.

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The probability is that Arbenz in the presidency would continue being an opportunist with respect to the labor leaders. If he needed extremist support to balance off other forces in the political scene, he would continue to coddle and encourage the crypto-communists. If he considered himself strong enough, he might well follow the line he indicated to our Embassy last summer shortly after the Arana assassination and dispense with them.

III. ACTIVITIES OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM IN GUATEMALA

The Communist Party

The Communist Party is outlawed by the Guatemalan constitution. There is strong evidence, however, that the Party, made up of 200 to 300 militants and organized into various cells unaware of the existence of other cells, is operating secretly in the country.

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[illegible]onsiderable information that points to the distinct possibility of an underground communist organization, with its militants strategically placed in effective control over memberships in labor and political groups amounting to many thousands. The two organizations in which the Party is believed to be principally represented are the CTG labor federation and the PAR political party. Actually, it perhaps is of small matter where there is or is not a functioning communist party in Guatemala today. Its disciples are there in number and have free rein, both within and without the Government. The infiltration of communist propaganda and indoctination has proceeded apace and has already achieved important objectives.

Labor's Participation in International Organizations

Since the 1944 revolution the strongest outside influence on Guatemalan labor has been that of Vicente

LOMBARDO

LOMBARDO Toledano and his communist-dominated CTAL. Numerous contacts have been established by Lombardo with Guatemalan labor and political leaders, and President AREVALO himself has played a leading part in this association.

The CTG is a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions and the FSG has recently applied for membership. Victor Manuel Gutierrez of CTG was chosen as one of the 36 members of the new executive committee of WFTU by the congress of that organization in Milan in June 1949. Manuel Pinto Usaga also attended the congress. Gutierrez and Jose Manuel Fortuny of PAR were in attendance at the communist-sponsored "Peace" Conference held in Paris in April 1949; both carried diplomatic passports and their trip was reportedly financed by emergency funds of the President and Foreign Minister. Gutierrez and Fortuny later led a verified delegation of ten persons from Guatemala to the Continental Congress for Peace held in Mexico City in September 1949. On the whole the influence of Lombardo and the CTAL have definitely increased in Guatemala since the Mexico City congress. In addition, the overtones of communism have appeared to be stronger.

The party-line hostility toward anti-communist labor groups was illustrated as recently as March 14 by the publication of an FSG bulletin in the newspaper Diario de

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la Manana, a Government mouthpiece. In reply to a report that a labor leader allegedly associated with the AFL and CIT, inter-American labor confederation in opposition to CTAL, would visit Guatemala, the bulletin stated in part: 'The Guatemalan syndical movement is perfectly defined, affiliated to the CTAL and to the World Federation of Trade Unions, and has nothing in common with the yellow organizations in the service of imperialism." Both the AFL and the CIO, as well as the CIT, are regularly denounced by organized labor in Guatemala as "agents of imperialism".

Relations with Mexican and Salvadoran Communists

Known communists from Mexico and elsewhere have been closely associated with Guatemalan labor leaders, and there is constant travel back and forth. They have strongly influenced the propaganda and activities carried on by a large majority of Guatemalan labor, such as the recent participation of the latter groups in the communist-backed "Peace" movement.

Guatemala continues to be a base of operations for the spreading of communist influence in at least one of its neighboring countries, El Salvador. This penetration is now reaching its highest point thus far as the campaign for March presidential elections nears its climax in that country. This influence has been exerted primarily through contact between pro-communist labor leaders in both countries.

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A favorable climate for these activities has been provided by President Arevalo and the Guatemalan Government, who have extended assistance to this movement and provided material aid to Salvadoran exiles of varied tendencies in Guatemala. Communists from Guatemala and Mexico are believed to have been among the principal advisers of the Salvadoran railway union during its strike in May 1949.

Relations with the USSR

Guatemala formally recognized the USSR in 1945. Guatemala does not maintain a diplomatic mission in Moscow, nor is there a Soviet mission in Guatemala. However, the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City maintains a regular distribution list in Guatemala City for its information bulletin.

Direct connections between Guatemala and Moscow are difficult to prove. Inspiration and guidance seem likely, probably through the trips of Guatemalan leaders abroad or through Lombardo, but no proof of direct control has yet been established.

Leftist Influence with Respect to the Rio Treaty

A pertinent example of the influence on Government thinking by communist-minded individuals is apparent in the lack of even preliminary steps by Guatemala toward ratification of the Rio Treaty. Guatemala is the only country in the Middle American area which has not approved the treaty, and President Truman took occasion to mention

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its importance to the Guatemalan Ambassador when the latter presented his credentials in January. Publication in Guatemala of the President's remarks on this point (his other statements regarding the need for fair and equitable treatment of all elements of national life were never published in Guatemala) brought out the pro-communist pack in full hue and cry. The national convention of workers' political committees then in session passed a resolution repudiating both the Rio Treaty and the Atlantic Pact as "harmful to national independence and transgressing the United Nations Charter". The semi-official Diario de la Manana attacked the two treaties in similar vein. There seems little likelihood of favorable action on the Rio agreement in the next session of the Guatemalan Congress, even assuming its submission to that body by the executive.

IV. INFILTRATION IN EDUCATION

The Teachers' Union

Principal efforts of the pro-communists in Guatemalan education have been directed toward organizing and gaining control of the teachers' union on a nation-wide basis. Until recently these efforts had seemed highly successful, and the Secretary General of the STEG union was none other than "Professor" Victor Manuel Gutierrez, well-known head of the CTG federation. However, at a February 15 meeting of the Guatemala City local of STEG, a rank-and-file revolt broke out against the union leadership. The issue was forced on the question of political action committees among the workers in education, but actually rebellion had been brewing for some time over the discontent of a large proportion of the teachers with the fact that their union was practically under communist control.

When the leaders' attempts at the February 15 meeting to quell the uprising were unsuccessful, they left the hall. The dissidents, who from all appearances constituted the great majority of those present, named leaders pro tem and continued the meeting. Their conclusions, as published in the press, were that STEG should maintain itself completely non-political and that the political committee formed within STEG should be absolutely disowned. They made known their

their intention to carry on the fight all over the country. While the STEG executive committee has indicated some concern over the pronouncements of the rebellious elements, it remains to be seen what success the revolt will finally have. The rebels have no easy battle ahead; they are fighting not just the political committees but the chiefs of their own union--essentially the same people are involved. The positions of syndical authority are in the hands of the foe, whose political alliance with the government renders their position all the more impregnable and the danger of effective retaliation against the dissidents all the stronger.

The University

Pro-communist elements appear to have made little headway with respect to infiltration of the faculty of the University of San Carlos. A conservative professor was chosen as Rector in elections in January. He was selected in preference to a fellow Dean considered generally to have better qualifications for the post but regarded as too friendly to the Arevalo Government. The retiring Rector of the University confided to an Embassy officer his concern over the political overtones which were apparent in the faculty balloting. He pointed out that the institution's income comes entirely from the Congress and expressed fear that, if the latter believes that reaction against the Government is in full control of the University, it might cut off all appropriations in retaliation.

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The communist-front Alliance of Guatemalan Democratic Youth was recently revealed to be receiving a monthly subsidy of $75.00 from the Ministry of Education. There have been charges from dissidents within the organization that it receives unspecified amounts from other ministries; and the Government Printing Office prints free of charge the monthly bulletin of the Alliance.

Effects on U. S. Educational Program

The educational activities conducted by our own Institute of Inter-American Affairs in cooperation with the Guatemalan Government have been directly and adversely affected by leftist influence in the country's labor and official life. Under the program of IIAA's Education sion there have been operated a normal school, with e on teaching in the rural areas, and an industrial educ project. An adverse situation has been developing in the normal school for many months and is now coming to a head. The background is as follows:

At the beginning of the 1949 school year, a Guatemalan teaching staff was installed at the normal school, with the American staff remaining as advisers. These changes were deemed advisable to avoid any accusation of "domination" of the rural schools, and with the purpose of beginning immediately the training of a local staff. The Guatemalan personnel

personnel were carefully chosen and worked in harmony with their American advisers until about October 1949, when it became obvious that the director and three of the teachers were intent on making trouble. It has now been established that the four troublemakers are closely connected with the far-left wing of the STEG and have intimate relations with the mentor of that group, Mrs. Virginia BRAVO Letelier, a Chilean believed to be an active communist organizer. Mrs. Bravo, with the aid of President Arevalo, was placed in the Ministry of Education in early 1949 as a technical adviser.

Shortly after trouble grew serious at the normal school, toward the end of November 1949, STEG opened a bitter press attack on the Minister of Education, Dr. Raul OSEGUEDA. It is understood that the real purpose of STEG is to eliminate the Minister who has no party affiliation, with the aim of having him replaced by a political tool who can be of use during the approaching presidential election campaign. The avowed purpose of the STEG was to have the Government suspend immediately, or allow to lapse in June 1950, the agreement with the IIAA on the grounds that it had enabled the placing of "imperialist agents" in rural areas, and was disrupting the solidarity of Guatemala's teachers. To date the Government of Guatemala has made no move to extend the agreement, and President Arevalo has been

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quoted as stating that Guatemala has no funds for such a cooperative program.

Concurrently with the trouble at the rural normal school, the IIAA's industrial education project at the Industrial School for Boys in the capital city began experiencing similar difficulties. Here the leader has been a Spanish refugee teaching in the school. He has succeeded in alienating most of the teachers from any feeling of respect or loyalty to the cooperative program.